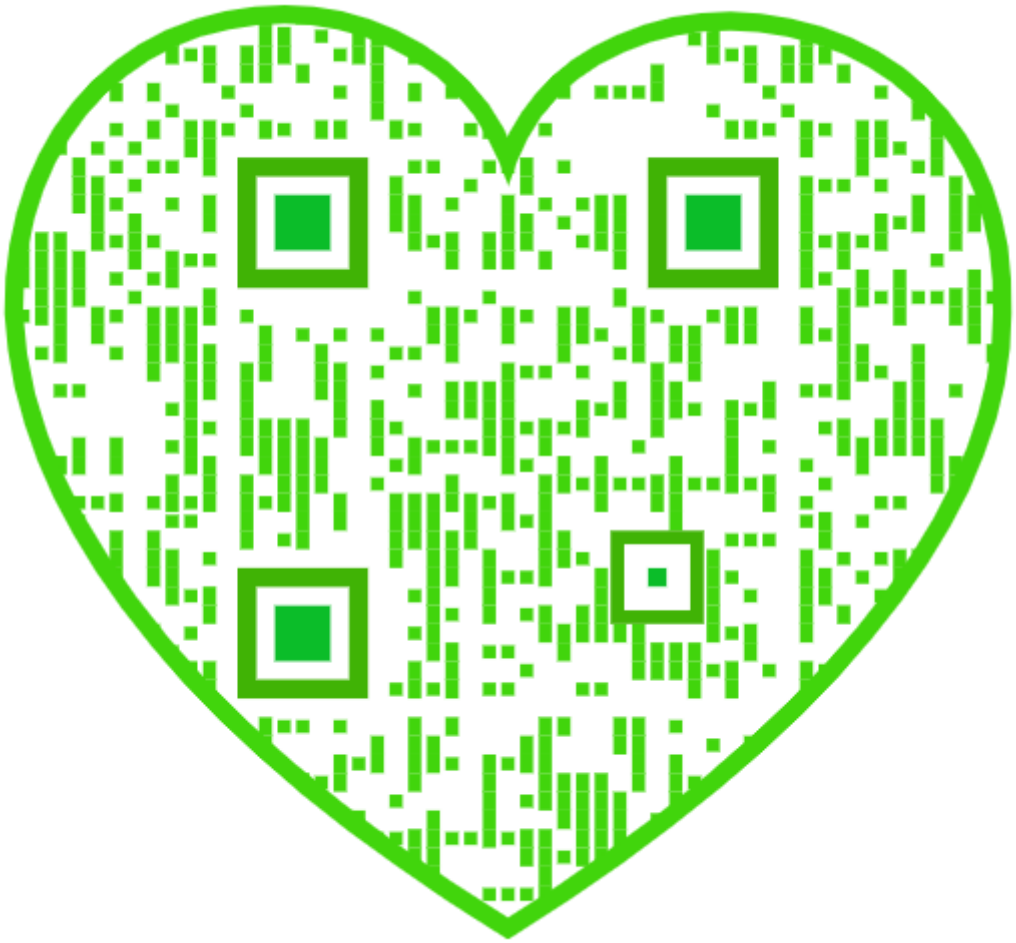

WILLIAM CAXTON

PRINTING

AN ACCOUNT OF ITS INVENTION

AND OF

WILLIAM CAXTON

THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTER

BY

DAVID MARSHALL, ESQ.

ADVOCATE

LONDON AND PARIS

A. QUANTIN AND C°

LONDON

18, THROGMORTON STREET

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Mar. 23, 1923
BY
Francis P. Magoun.
Cambridge

TO THE MASTER, WARDENS AND ASSISTANTS OF THE

WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF MERCERS

OF THE CITY OF LONDON

THIS MEMORIAL OF

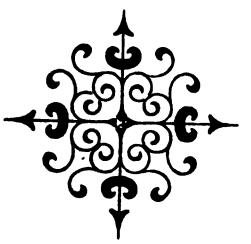
WILLIAM CAXTON

ONE OF THEIR MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LIVERYMEN,

IS WITH THEIR PERMISSION

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT

THE AUTHOR



PREFACE

The following account of the early history of printing and of the introduction of the art into England is in part a reproduction of two articles which recently appeared in one of the leading English Magazines. It does not profess to be more than a sketch of the subject; but it has been revised with some care, and the author hopes that it will be found accurate. There has been so much controversy on the question that it is difficult to reach the truth.

London, June 1877.

PRINTING

AND

ITS INTRODUCTION INTO ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

EARLIEST ATTEMPTS AT PRINTING — BLOCK-BOOKS

THE origin of the art of printing is involved in some obscurity, but the main facts connected with its introduction into Europe are now sufficiently ascertained. Those who delight in tracing every invention back to its rudimentary form, regard the moulded bricks of Assyria and Egypt as the earliest of all printed records, and this is probably true enough if the word printing is used in a sense so wide as to

include every sort of impressed characters produced by means of a mould or die. In this view the use of seals, which is of high antiquity, is another form of the art, as is also the art of coining money, first practised, according to Herodotus, by the Lydians.

That there is some analogy between all these processes and that of the modern printer will be readily admitted. But it is not the purpose of this essay to enter upon the large subject of the antiquity of printing, in this, its most extended signification. All that is intended is to give a brief account of the rise and progress of typography in the ordinary sense of the word.

There seems to be no doubt that the art of taking impressions from engraved wooden blocks by means of a pigment or ink, was in common use in China many centuries before it was known in Europe. When the late Earl of Elgin was British Ambassador in China, he was at some pains to collect evidence on this subject. The inquiry was conducted by Mr. Thomas Taylor Meadows, whose report is contained in a letter to Lord Elgin, printed by the Honourable Robert Curzon in a paper contributed by him to the sixth volume of the "Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society." Mr. Meadows's letter is an excellent *résumé* of historical facts illustrative of the early use of block printing in China, and it establishes conclusively that before the Tang dynasty, that is, before A. D. 620, there were no printed

books in China; while on the other hand, about the year A. D. 900 they were known to a high officer and essayist [Fung-taon] to be in common use as school-books in one portion of the country. "I think," he adds, "we may therefore safely say that the printing of books for sale and use in place of manuscripts began about A. D. 860, or a thousand years ago."

The mode in which these blocks were produced wasexceedingly ingenious. First, a manuscript copy of the work to be printed was written on the thin paper still in universal use in China. It was then glued to the block, face downwards, and brushed over with oil to render it transparent. The engraver had thus before him a reversed tracing of the manuscript to be printed, and by cutting through the paper and hollowing out the unmarked spaces of the block, he at once obtained a page of type. Impressions from this were taken by means of a thin pigment resembling Indian ink. No printing press was used, but the block was placed with its lettered side uppermost and moistened with ink. The sheets to be printed were then laid lightly on the top, and a soft brush passed over them to fix the impression. It is said that a dexterous Chinese printer could in this way take many thousand impressions in a day.

There is a striking similarity between these Chinese books and the block-books of Germany and Holland.

The impressions are taken on one side of the paper only, and they are similarly bound, both the Chinese and the European books being so arranged by the binder as that the two printed pages shall lie face to face. In both countries it was customary to paste the blank sides of the leaves together, so as to make the printed matter continuous. The earliest European block-books also bear marks of having been produced by friction over the block, and not by the application of heavy pressure. Altogether, Mr. Curzon says, " the German and Oriental block-books are so precisely alike in almost every respect, that unless we can find one of the European books with any pretence to an antiquity previous to the year 860, we must suppose that the process of printing them must have been copied from ancient Chinese specimens brought from that country by some early traveller, whose name has not been handed down to our time. "

Some writers on the history of typography maintain that the art thus practised in China, was brought to Europe as early as the times of Marco Polo; and a few years ago this tradition obtained fresh currency on the Continent, in consequence of the erection of a statue to one Panfilo Castaldi, at the expense of the printers of Milan. This Panfilo Castaldi, according to Italian accounts, was a native of Feltre, who, having seen some Chinese books brought home by Marco Polo,

and being acquainted with the use of stamps of Murano glass in forming the initial letters of manuscripts, conceived the idea of fabricating types of wood or metal, each consisting of a single letter, and actually succeeded in printing with these several single sheets of letter-press at Venice, in the year 1426. It is added, that John Fust visited him at Feltre, and thus acquired a knowledge of the art of typography, which he afterwards developed in Germany.

The story of Castaldi is supported by no documentary or other historical evidence of the period, and indeed cannot be traced back beyond the eighteenth century. Many circumstances combine to throw discredit on it. Marco Polo, who mentions with minute detail, almost every fact connected with China, strangely enough makes no reference to the art of printing books, though it must have been in common use during his residence there, and though he mentions the use of a seal smeared with vermilion for stamping the bark money of the Great Kaan. No Venetian block-book exists of a date so early as those produced in Germany, and no book is known to have been printed with movable type in Venice previous to the year 1469, when John de Spira issued his first edition of the *Epistolæ Familiares* of Cicero. Further, the known facts regarding the infancy of European printing are irreconcilable with any theory which assumes the exis-

tence of movable wood or metal types previous to the middle of the fifteenth century. We can trace the progress of the art in Europe step by step from its rude beginning to its perfected form, so completely as to preclude the idea of its having been introduced as a matured and established invention, proceeding by methods already discovered.

There are books in existence in Europe, which have been printed as early as the fifth or sixth century of our era, but these appear to have been executed not with a printing-press, or by means of xylography. Of this class tow may be mentioned, the *Codex Argenteus* in the library at Upsal, and the quarto *Gospels* in the library of the Chapter at Verona. The former of these is in Mœso-Gothic character, and appears to have been produced in the North of Europe. The latter, one of the most magnificent monuments of the printer's art, is executed in letters of silver on dark blue vellum, with initial letters of gold. It is evident from the appearance of both, that each letter has been stamped separately on the vellum with a hot die, such as is used at the present day by bookbinders in lettering the back of a book. In some places unnecessary force has been used in impressing the stamp, and the page has been cut through by the sharp edge of the die. In others the die appears to have been over-heated, and the vellum is burned.

It will be observed that this process, though unquestionably a form of printing, did nothing to facilitate the multiplication of copies of a manuscript. On the contrary, it must have been much more tedious than writing. Many centuries elapsed before the art took a more practical shape.

That xylography, or printing from engraved blocks of wood, is the earliest form in which printing appeared in Europe is now generally admitted; but if we try to trace the art of wood engraving back to its origin, we find ourselves again landed in a region of unauthenticated legend, and unsupported conjecture. The story of the two Cunios has been often told, but cannot be regarded as worthy of the slightest credit. According to it, a volume entitled "The Heroic Actions, represented in Figures, of the Great and Magnanimous Macedonian King, the Bold and Valiant Alexander," was executed in 1284 or 1285, by the twin brother and sister Alessandro Alberico Cunio, Cavaliere, and Isabella Cunio, when only sixteen years of age. It was dedicated to Pope Honorius IV., and is described by its pretended authors as "first reduced, imagined, and attempted to be executed in relief, with a small knife, on blocks of wood made even and polished by this learned and dear sister; continued and finished by us together at Ravenna, from the eight pictures of our invention, painted six times larger than here represen-

ted, engraved, explained by verses, and then marked upon paper to perpetuate the number of them, and to enable us to present them to our relations and friends, in testimony of gratitude, friendship and affection."

The engravings were discovered in the house of M. de Greder, a Swiss gentleman, by M. Papillon. They were bound in a book which contained annotations regarding their history, from which it appeared that the volume had been given to one John J. Turine, by the Count of Cunio. The whole story is incredible. Papillon belonged to a family which had been long connected with the art of wood Engraving. Some of the tailpieces which he contributed along with Lesueur to a folio edition of Lafontaine's fables are of great merit. But as a historian he appears to be wholly uncritical and untrustworthy. Heinecken, who regards the beginning of the sixteenth century as the period when wood engraving was introduced into Italy, treats the historical part of his *Traité de la Gravure en Bois* with contempt. "Je ne puis nommer aucun artiste de ce pays," he says "qui ait taillé en bois avant *Hugo da Carpi, Dominique Beccafumi,* et *Balthasar Peruzzi,* peintres, qui étaient presque contemporains, et qui travaillèrent au commencement du XVI^e^ siècle. Ce que *Marolles* dit des gravures sur bois en Italie, avant ces maîtres, n'est qu'une conjecture. *Florent le Comte* a copié ses fautes, et Papillon les a

augmentées plus que tous les autres, dans son traité de la gravure en bois : ouvrage dont le premier tome (car pour le second je ne suis pas juge compétent) est rempli d'erreurs, de fables et de minuties, tellement qu'il ne vaut pas la peine de les réfuter. Cependant je suis convaincu que l'auteur, dont je connais le caractère, a écrit tout cela de bonne foi, sans en savoir davantage." (*Idée générale des Estampes,* p. 150.)

Towards the end of the fourteenth century the use of playing cards became general on the continent of Europe, and they were manufactured on a large scale in many places. Heinecken thinks that engraved blocks were first used by the card manufactures to impress on playing cards the outlines of the figures required to be produced, these outlines being afterwards filled in by the hand. In process of time figures of the saints were struck off in a similar manner. Many of the latter were preserved by the monks, and are still in existence. Most of them are without date; but some have not only their date but a line or two of letter-press attached to them, and printed from the engraved block which contained the figure. Of this class Heinecken discovered the oldest known example bearing a date, in the Chartreuse at Buxheim, near Memmingen, one of the most ancient religious houses in Germany. It is an engraving

of Saint Christopher carrying the infant Jesus across an arm of the sea : a hermit with a lantern is standing on the opposite side of the water, and in the distance a peasant, with a sack on his back, is climbing a hill. The sheet is of folio size, and the engraving has been coloured. Underneath is the inscription, precious in the eyes of the bibliographer as the earliest dated letter-press that has been found —

Christofori faciem, die quacunque tueris
Illa nempe die morte mala non morieris.

Millesimo CCCC° XX° tercio.

The extent to which the manufacture of cards and figure-prints from wooden blocks was carried on in the first half of the fifteenth century is curiously illustrated by a decree of the Venetian Government, dated the 11th of October, 1441, the first public document in which mention is made of the art of wood engraving. It refers to the decay of the Venetian trade in cards and figures, proceeding thus : " Whereas the art and mystery of making cards and printed figures which is used in Venice has fallen to total decay; and this in consequence of the great quantity of playing cards and coloured figures printed which are made out of Venice; to which evil it is necessary to apply some remedy in order that the said artists, who are a great many in

family, may find encouragement rather than foreigners: Let it be ordered and established according to that which the said masters have supplicated, that from this time in future no work of the said art that is printed or painted on cloth or on paper, that is to say, altar-pieces (or images) and playing cards and whatever other work of the said art is done with a brush and printed, shall be allowed to be brought or imported into this city, &c." Wood engraving must have first risen to importance and prosperity, and afterwards sunk into decay in Venice, before such a proclamation could be made by the Government, so that it may safely be assumed to have been practised in that city very early in the fifteenth century.

It is in these rude woodcuts that we find the origin of the art of printing. The time was favourable for the rapid development of the invention, and especially for its adaptation to the production of books. Europe had awakened from the centuries of ignorance which are known to us as the dark ages. It was a period of fresh literary activity in almost every country of the Continent. The long neglected libraries of the monasteries were yielding up their priceless treasures; the dead sages of Greece and Rome were beginning anew to make their calm voices heard, and the mellow light of a forgotten culture was dawning over the birth of a new civilization. Kings and princes had ceased to

pride themselves on their ignorance of letters and of art, and were vieing with one another as patrons of learning. Noble libraries were being formed at a fabulous cost. No price was considered too high for the elaborate and exquisitely beautiful manuscripts which came from the hands of the copyists and illuminators, and the precious volumes were not seldom adorned with bindings brilliant in gold and jewels. No one, who has not seen the principal collections of middle-age manuscripts, can form any idea of the sumptuousness with which they are decorated, and the beauty with which they are written.

In such an age it was natural that the attention of inventors and men of letters should be specially directed to the means of rapidly multiplying copies of the manuscripts most in demand. The block-books, which have already been described, were the earliest efforts of the mediæval printers. The earliest specimen of these block-books, and the first book printed in Europe, was the celebrated *Biblia Pauperum* or *Bible of the Poor,* once a popular religious manual, of which many editions were issued in Holland, Flanders, and Germany, between 1400 and 1475. There is in the British Museum a beautiful copy of what is considered on good authority to be the first edition of this book. Like all the early block-books, it is undated, but connoisseurs are able by certain peculiarities to deter-

mine with great accuracy the period at which the impression was taken. The *Biblia Pauperum* consists of forty leaves printed by friction with a brownish ink on one side of the paper. The pages are not exactly of the same size, but vary between nine and a half and ten inches in height by seven and a half in width. The centre of each page is divided into three compartments, each of which contains an engraving of a scriptural subject. There are also on every page four figures of saints or prophets, two at the top and two at the bottom. The letter-press commences at the top of each page and occupies the vacant space between the engravings. It consists of the texts of scripture illustrated in the engravings. The prophets and saints have their names printed below them, and the bottom of the page is filled up with additional inscriptions bearing on the subjects represented.

This somewhat minute description of the *Biblia Pauperum* will serve to convey a tolerably correct idea of the first attempts made at letter-press printing. It will be observed that the figures preponderate over the letter-press in its pages, and this is the case with many of the earliest block-books. The cuts were often coloured by the hand.

Another famous block-book is the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*, a volume which has been the subject of more controversy among typographical antiquarians

than any other early product of the printer's art. The Latin editions of it consist of sixty-three leaves in small folio, on which are fifty-eight engraved pictures, each of which has two lines of rhymed Latin printed beneath it. That the engraved figures have been produced from wooden blocks admits of no doubt, but opinion has long been divided on the question whether the letter-press is executed by means of fixed blocks or of movable types. It seems certain that some of the letter-press is block-work and that in some editions movable type either of wood or of metal has been employed.

Most of the block-books are of a religious character. Various parts of the Bible were printed from time to time in this form. A well-known specimen of block-printing is entitled *Ars Memorandi, or, a Memoria Technica for learning by heart the four Gospels.* Almanacks were early published as block-books in Germany. The earliest of these proceded from the press of the celebrated astronomer Regiomontanus, at Nuremberg, about 1474. The last printed block-book was entitled *Opera nova Contemplativa, — Figure del Testamento Vecchio, etc.* It was produced in Venice about 1510, by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore.

CHAPTER II

THE ART OF PRINTING WITH MOVABLE TYPES — VARIOUS CLAIMS TO ITS INVENTION — LAURENT JANSZOON OF HAARLEM.

SEVEN cities are said to have contested for the glory of having given birth to Homer. More than seven have claimed the honour of having been the cradle of modern typography. Haarlem, Mentz, Strasburgh, Dordrecht, Venice, Rome, Florence, and a host of others have at one time or another put forward their pretensions; but criticism has rejected these pretensions as groundless in all cases except two, and Haarlem and Mentz are the only competitors whose claims still find champions among antiquarians and bibliophiles.

Those who trace the origin of modern typography, that is, of printing with movable types as distinguished

from block-printing, to Haarlem, attribute the invention to one Laurent Janszoon, or Laurence Coster, a native of that city, who is said to have been born about 1370, and to have died about 1440. These dates are given on the authority of Meerman[1], but he admits that they are conjectural.

Almost all that is known of Laurent Janszoon is derived from a passage in the BATAVIA of Adrian Junius, a learned physician of Haarlem, and a man of great literary eminence, who was born about seventy-two years after the date of Janszoon's death, and who wrote the book which has just been mentioned at least a hundred and twenty years after that event.

"*Hadriani Junii Hornani, Medici,* BATAVIA" was first printed in 1588, and at that time the universal opinion of the world was, and had for more than a century been, that printing was invented at Mentz, and by John Gutenberg. Junius himself bears witness to this fact[2]. His account of Laurent Janszoon is a follows :

1. Meerman's *Origines typographicæ*, vol. I, p. 49, 52. *Hagæ Comitum, etc.*, 1765.

2. Speaking of Haarlem, Junius says : « Redeo ad urbem nostram, cui primam inventæ isthic artis typographicæ gloriam deberi et summo jure asserandam aio, utpote propriam et nativam; sed luminibus nostris sola afficit inveterata illa et quæ encausti modo inscripta est animis opinio, tam altis innixa radicibus quas nulli ligones, nulli cunei, nulla rutra revellere aut eruere valeant, quâ pertinaciter credunt et persuasissimum habent apud Mogontiacum claram et vetustam Germaniæ urbem primò repertas litterarum formulas quibus excuderentur libri. » *Batavia*, p. 253, ed. 1588.

"There dwelt at Haarlem, 128 years ago, in a mansion of considerable splendour (as the fabric which still remains complete will prove), overlooking the Market Place and opposite to the Royal Palace, one LAURENTIUS JOANNES[1], surnamed *Custos* or *Ædituus*, because his family enjoyed the distinction of possessing by hereditary right the lucrative and honourable office then known by that name. For this man is now claimed on the clearest grounds, and in terms of most solemn asseverations made on the subject, the honour of having invented the typographic art, an honour which has been unjustly obtained and possessed by others, though he is clearly entitled to it and to wear laurels more noble than any conqueror ever wore.

"Walking in a wood near the city (as was the custom with citizens having plenty of leisure on festivals or after dinner), he began to cut some letters on the bark of a beech tree in inverted order, and took impressions of them upon paper for his own amusement, and as a specimen for his grandchildren (the children of his daughter) to imitate. Having succeeded in this, and being a man of talent and ingenuity, he began to meditate greater things, and being assisted by his son-in-law, Peter Thomas (who had four sons, who almost all attained consular dignity, and whom I mention to

1. This is probably a misprint for LAURENTIUS JOANNIS.

show that the art owed its origin, not to a low family, but, on the contrary, to one of distinguished rank and consideration), he invented a more glutinous and tenacious kind of ink, perceiving that the common ink spread and produced blots. He then formed wooden tablets, or pages with figures and letters cut upon them. Of this kind I have myself seen an anonymous work, written in the vernacular tongue, entitled *Speculum Nostræ Salutis,* the first rude essay, printed not on both sides, but on opposite pages only, the reverse sides being pasted together to conceal the blank pages which would have been unsightly. These types of beech he afterwards changed for lead, and after that for pewter, as being a more hard and durable substance; from the remains of which those old wine-pots were cast that are still visible in the mansion of which I have spoken, looking towards the Market Place, and which was afterwards inhabited by his grandson, Gerard Thomas, who died a few years since at a very advanced age, and whom I here mention with respect as a most honourable gentleman and a highly respected citizen. The curiosity of men is naturally excited by a new invention, and when this commodity, never before seen, attracted purchasers on all sides and became a source of great profit, the love of the art became more general, and work and workmen (the first cause of misfortune) were multiplied. Amongst those so employed

was one John Faustus. Whether he was, as I suspect, ominously so called, for he was faithless and unlucky to his master, or whether that really was his name, I shall not here inquire, being unwilling to disturb the silent shades of those who suffer from a consciousness of the sins they have committed in this life. This person, bound by oath to keep the invention a secret, as soon as he supposed he knew the mode of joining the letters together, the method of casting the types, and other matters belonging to the art, having seized the opportunity of Christmas-eve, whilst all were employed in the customary lustral sacrifices, puts together all his master's tools connected with the art, seizes all the types, elopes from the house, accompanied by one other thief as an accomplice, proceeds first to Amsterdam, then to Cologne, and at length settles at Mentz. There he considered himself safe from the reach of his pursuers, as in an asylum where he might carry on a gainful trade with the fruits of his iniquity. Clear it certainly is, that in about a year after this, about A. D. 1442, the *Doctrinale of Alexander Gallus,* a grammar in much repute at that time, and the *Tracts of Peter of Spain* were brought out there with the very types which LAURENTIUS made use of at Haarlem.

" This is the account which I have heard from venerable men, worthy of credit, to whom the story

had been delivered; and I have myself met many other persons who corroborate and confirm the statements by the similitary of their testimony. I remember that the instructor of my youth, Nicolaus Galius, a man distinguished by an active and retentive memory, has mentioned to me that he more than once, when a boy, heard one Cornelius, a bookbinder, who had been employed in the office, and lived to the age of eighty, relate with great emotion the whole of the transaction, describe the history and progress of the art, and all the circumstances connected with it, as he had received the account from his master... This account agrees pretty nearly with that of Quirinus Talesius, the Burgomaster, who had it almost immediately from the mouth of Cornelius himself."

The tradition thus narrated by Junius is not without support from other and earlier authorities; but these make no mention of Laurent Janszoon.

The first of them is the celebrated COLOGNE CHRONICLE printed by Johan Koelhoff in that city in 1499, a book now of extraordinary rarity. It gives the following account of the early history of printing.

"*Item.* This most worthy and honourable art of printing was first discovered at Mentz, in Germany, and it is a great honour to the German nation that such ingenious men were found in it. This happened about the year of our Lord 1440, and from that time to the

year 1450 which was a Golden Year (or Jubilee Year), the art and all that belongs to it was rendered more and more perfect. And in the year of our Lord 1450, then men began to print; and the first book printed was the Bible in Latin, and it was printed in a larger character than that in which men now print mass-books.

"*Item.* Although the art was invented at Mentz as aforesaid in the manner in which it is now commonly used, yet the first idea originated in Holland, from the *Donatuses,* which were printed there before that time; and from thence was derived the beginning of the foresaid art, and as now used it is a more masterly and subtle discovery than the ancient mode was, and in the course of time has reached more and more perfection.

"*Item.* A person named Omnebonus states in a preface to a book called *Quintilianus,* and in other books, that a certain Frenchman, Nicolaus Genson by name, first discovered this great art, but this is evidently untrue. For there are still living, persons who can prove that books were printed in Venice before Nicolaus Genson went there and began to cut [*snijden*] and prepare type. But the first discoverer of typography was a citizen of Mentz, named Johan Gudenburch, a native of Strasburgh and by birth a gentleman.

"*Item.* From Mentz the foresaid art first came to

Cologne, from thence to Strasburgh, and from thence to Venice. The origin and progress of the foresaid art were described to me with his own lips by that honoured man Master Ulrich Tzell of Hainault, who is a printer at Cologne at the present moment in the year 1499, and to whom the city of Cologne is indebted for introducing into it this art.

" *Item*. Some ignorant people maintain that books were printed in more ancient times; but that is not true, for in no country in the world are books printed in those times to be found. "

In 1561 Theodore Volchart Coornhert, a printer at Haarlem, and an eminent author and artist, published a Dutch version of *Cicero de Officiis*. In dedicating this book to the magistrates of Haarlem, he states that he had often been informed that typography was invented in Haarlem " though somewhat in a rude form; " that the art was afterwards carried to Mentz by an unfaithful servant and was there brought to perfection; and that the honour of having given birth to it had been accorded to Mentz by the neglect of the citizens of Haarlem to assert their right to it. " I am aware," he continues, " that the common opinion that this art was invented at Mentz, is now so firmly established, that it is in vain to hope to change it even by the best evidence and the most irrefragable proof. But truth does not cease to be truth because it is known only to a few; and I

for my part believe this to be most certain, convinced as I am by the faithful testimonies of men alike respectable from their age and authority; who not only have told me of the family of the inventor, and of his name and surname, but have even described to me the rude manner of printing first used, and pointed out to me with their fingers the abode of the first printer[1]."

A few years after the publication of Coornhert's book, Luigi Guicciardini, a nephew of the celebrated historian of Italy, composed his *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi*. It was published at Antwerp in 1567 and contains the following paragraph on the origin of printing. It will be observed that Guicciardini is more careful in his assertions than the Dutch writers.

"In this city (Haarlem), not only by the public assertion of its inhabitants and other Hollanders, but also by the testimony of some writers and other memorials, we find that the art of printing and stamping letters and characters on paper, as now practised, was invented. And that the inventor dying before the art was brought to perfection and consequent estimation, his servant (as it is said) went to dwell at Mentz, where, showing the light of this art, he was received with joy, and setting himself diligently to work there

1. The translation given in the text is extracted from Mr. Ottley's *Inquiry concerning the invention of Printing*, p. 13.

with much success, the art became generally known and entirely perfected; from whence has arisen and become universal the report that from that city (Mentz) is derived the art and science of printing : let what may be the truth, I cannot, nor will I, decide; it is enough that I have said thus much to avoid prejudicing this city and country."

Other writers have been quoted on the same side of the question, and their evidence is of a similar character, but even more indirect and unsatisfactory. Thus Angelo Rocca, the director of the pontifical press under Sixtus V, states in his Appendix to the Account of the Vatican Library that Aldus the younger once showed him a *Donatus* containing on its first page a memorandum in the hand-writing of Mariangelus Accursius in which itwas stated that though Fust was the inventor of metal types he took the idea from a *Donatus* which had been previously printed from engraved wooden blocks in Holland. And Scriverius quotes in his famous *Laure-crans voor Laurens Coster* some fragments of a lost work by one Jan van Zuren, a partner of Coornhert's in the Haarlem printing business, in which Coornhert's testimony is corroborated.

Such is the historical evidence on which the claims of Laurent Janszoon to be regarded as the inventor of printing are founded. It has been stated at considerable length in order that it might be stated fairly.

It was Meerman who first collected and digested this evidence about printing at Haarlem. He has added to it almost every scrap of information that the widest reading could amass regarding Laurent Janszoon. Without encumbering these pages with his *pièces justificatives*, the following statement of the results at which he arrived may be inserted.

According to Meerman, Laurent Janszoon was descended, with a bar sinister on his shield, from the ancient house of Brederode, once sovereign in Holland. His father was Hans Laurentszoon, of Haarlem. Thus the invention of the noble art of typography can be traced to a man of noble birth; and it is a strange coincidence, says Meerman, that Gutenberg, who introduced metallic type in room of the wooden ones used by Janszoon, was also of patrician descent. Not only was this no discredit to Gutenberg, but he continued, after his invention became known, to be regarded as a nobleman, and was even attached to the court of the Elector Adolphus! Indeed in early times printers were held in such honour, that Frederick III conceded to them the right of wearing garments decorated with gold and silver; and the result was that in the fifteenth century men of equestrian rank and ecclesiastical dignitaries practised the art, which fell into disrepute and came to be exercised by the common herd only after many years.

Adrian Junius is therefore, in Meerman's eyes, guilty of a grave error when he says that Laurent Janszoon was descended from a family which received the name of Coster on account of their hereditary right to the office of sacristan or sexton.

Laurent Janszoon is first mentioned in the public records in 1408, on which occasion it is recorded that he was fined sixty nobles for taking part in an insurrection at Haarlem. At various times between 1423 and 1434, he was a magistrate or treasurer of the city. Some even assert that he reached the highest municipal dignity which his fellow-citizens had it in their power to bestow; but Meerman was not able to verify this.

The size of the house which he occupied proves that he was a rich man. His wife's name was Catherine, and their sole offspring was a daughter Lucia, who afterwards married Thomas Peterszoon, Coster's future assistant in typography.

Meerman felt some difficulty in believing Junius's statement that the first attempts at typography were made with beech-bark in the woods of Haarlem; and he could find no authority for Scriverius's assertion that the material used by Janszoon in his first experiment was an oak-branch which left an impression of his carved letters on the paper in which it was wrapped in his pocket while he slept in the wood. The latter

account seemed too like a fable; and Meerman disposes of the question by supposing that a branch of beech and not a piece of bark alone was used [1].

It is not very easy, says Meerman, after the lapse of three centuries, to determine what was the nature of the verses engraved by Janszoon on beech in the wood. Yet ENSCHEDIUS, the printer, thinks he has done so; and has found the whole of the original verses printed on both sides of the page, on vellum of ancient manufacture. They consist of the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed etc. in the Latin language. After mature consideration, and comparison of the type of this little book with the first Dutch edition of the *Speculum*, and with some Dutch *Donatuses*, Meerman agrees with ENSCHEDIUS that this is the veritable work of Janszoon.

This being settled, it is easy for Meerman to determine the date of Laurent Janszoon's discovery. Junius says the verses were inscribed on bark and printed for the use of Janszoon's grandchildren. But these grandchildren must have reached some considerable age

1. "Hæc [Scriverii narratio] ob adjectas de somno circumstantias respirare aliquid videtur fabulosi. Vestustiorem proinde auctoritatem sequendam esse extra dubitum colloco, eaque ab omni crisi liberabitur, si fagino cortici, cujus fragilis aliquantulum videtur substantia, ramum substituamus ex quo primum omnium solutiles characteres in nemore obambulans sculpsit Laurentius."

before they could know the Latin tongue. Peter, the elder of them, had children of his own in 1440, so that he must have been married at least in 1438. Supposing him to have married at the early age of twenty, he must have been born about 1418, and his younger brother Andrew was probably two or three years younger. Thus Peter would be twelve, and Andrew ten years of age in 1430. Therefore the invention of typography may be placed about 1430.

Meerman goes on to deny that Laurent Janszoon ever used cast type; and to discredit the story told by Junius about the two wine-cups made of old type said to be still in the possession of Janszoon's heirs. His reason for this is that "metal types, at all events cast metal types, were never invented at Haarlem, but at Mentz." Then he repeats the story of the theft of type from Janszoon; but seeing the absurdity of supposing that Fust, a rich and well-known merchant in Mentz, was ever a servant of Janszoon's and a thief, and knowing that John Gutenberg was in Strasburgh at the time of the alleged theft, he charges with it a certain John Gensfleisch, senior brother of the celebrated printer, who, though of noble birth, had been compelled by poverty to enter Janszoon's service.

"Je pense," says Santander, and his criticism is not too severe, "que le plus habile romancier, l'auteur de *Don Quichotte*, appuyé de tous les documens

de Cide Hamete Ben Engeli, n'aurait pas si adroitement réussi que M. Meerman, dans la composition et le dénoûment de son roman typographique, enfanté par un penchant fanatique pour la gloire de sa patrie. "

Later writers, among whom none has been more patient and careful in his researches than Mr. Ottley in his works on Engraving and Early Printing, have sought to maintain the claims of Coster, by proving from internal evidence that the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis* is of Dutch origin; that it was printed at Haarlem; that it was printed with cast metal type; that it was printed by Laurent Janszoon; and that it was printed before typography was known to Gutenberg. The field of discussion opened by these writers is too wide to be entered upon in this little volume, and the arguments used are too technical to be capable of explanation without the aid of illustrations from the original works. But the opinion of the best informed bibliographers remains unshaken. It is admitted that no book bearing a date is known to have been printed at Haarlem before 1483, more than a quarter of a century after the famous Mentz Psalter was issued by Fust and Schoeffer, and the story of movable types having been formed from beech-bark is incredible in the face of the known fact that even wooden blocks are found to be insufficient for typographic purposes except in the case of type of enor-

mous size. The story of Fust's escape from Haarlem to Mentz with all Coster's tools and all his types is absurd, and similar stories have been told repeatedly with regard to almost every city where printing was made a trade : the famous *Speculum* is attributed to Holland solely because the critics of engraving declare it to be a sample of Dutch rather than of German art : it is attributed to an early date on no grounds which will bear to be stated : granting it to be of Dutch execution, there is no reason for asserting that it was printed at Haarlem; and finally, supposing, in the face of all these difficulties, that it was printed at Haarlem, there is no proof that Coster had anything to do with the printing of it.

The arguments regarding the other books attributed to Coster are so similar to those affecting the *Speculum* that we need not again travel over the technicalities of the question.

CHAPTER III

MENTZ. LIFE OF JOHN GUTENBERG

ON the left bank of the Rhine, just where that river is joined by the Maine, stands the ancient city of Mentz. A Roman Fort was established there many years before the Christian era. Drusus Germanicus afterwards erected another Fort on the opposite bank of the river which is now occupied by the town of Castel. A bridge connects Castel with Mentz, of which it is at the present day a suburb.

Mentz has various claims to historic renown. In A. D. 70 it was garrisoned by the twenty-second Roman Legion, which had gone through the war in Palestine, and had taken part in the destruction of

Jerusalem. One of the centurions of this Legion was Crescentius, who introduced Christianity into Rhenish Germany, suffered martyrdom under Trajan, was afterwards canonized, and ranks first on the long roll of the bishops of Mentz. In A. D. 235 Alexander Severus was put to death there by the revolted Roman soldiery; and it was in the neighbourhood of Mentz according to tradition, that Constantine saw in the Heavens the famous cross of fire, surmounted by the legend "*In hoc signo vinces,*" which led to his conversion to the Christian faith. In A. D. 743 Gervilius was bishop, and was deposed from his office for homicide committed in battle and for other offences. Thereupon Winfried, now better known as S. Boniface, who at that time held the rank of an archbishop without having any archiepiscopal see, was appointed his successor, and the cathedral of Mentz became the metropolitan church of Germany. After the close of the tenth century the archbishops of Mentz ranked not only among the highest dignitaries of the Church, but among the chief temporal princes of the Empire, and they became ultimately by far the most influential of all the German Electors. Their jurisdiction in civil affairs extended over more than four hundred thousand people: they had a revenue of more than a million and a half florins; and at one time their spiritual authority was paramount over nearly all Germany. In

the middle of the thirteenth century Mentz was an important centre of commerce, and it was there, in 1247, that Arnold de Walboten founded the famous Confederation of the Rhine, which broke the power of feudal aristocracy, opened larger and safer routes for trade than had ever before been enjoyed, and gave to the German towns a freedom and independence which stimulated industry in all its branches.

But the crowning glory of Mentz is that it gave birth to Gutenberg. A family of patrician descent and of honourable repute, bearing the name of Gensfleisch, possessed, in the fourteenth century, an estate called Sorgenloch, in the immediate neighbourhood of that city. They had two mansions in Mentz, one called *Zum Gensfleisch*, the other called *Zum Gutenberg*. In one of these, situated at the junction of the Pfandhausgasse and the Emmerangasse, Hans, or John Gensfleisch was born, in, or a few years previous to, 1400. He is sometimes called Gensfleisch de Sorgenloch, sometimes Gensfleisch de Gutenberg. It is by the name of Gutenberg that he is now best known.

Little has been ascertained regarding his early history. That he resided in Strasburgh in 1424, is proved by a letter written by him to his sister in that year. Tradition says that he was forced to leave Mentz on account of the part he took in opposing

an insurrection of the citizens against the nobility; and in 1430, when the differences between the two parties were settled by mutual concessions, he is mentioned as one of "the nobles who are not present in the country." CONRAD III in that year passed an act of amnesty in favour of several Moguntine citizens who had been driven into exile during the troubles; but Gutenberg does not seem to have taken advantage of it except for the purpose of making a short visit to his native town in 1432.

The civic records of Strasburgh show that he resided in that city from 1436 to 1444. In 1436 he was the defendant in an action for breach of promise of marriage brought against him by a lady named *Ann zur Isernen Thür,* or Ann of the Iron Door, whom he appears to have afterwards married.

Baron Heinecken describes him as "un homme plein de projets," and every thing we know of his history proves the correctness of the description. At Strasburgh many persons applied to him to teach them the various arts and contrivances which he had invented. Many years previous to 1439 a certain Andrew Dritzehen was instructed by him in a new method of polishing stones, which turned out to be exceedingly profitable. He was afterwards associated with Hans Riffe, Mayor of Lichtenau, in manufacturing by some secret art a sort of wares sold at the fairs held annually

in Aix-la-Chapelle. In this partnership Hans Riffe was entitled to one third of the profits obtained, and the remaining two thirds belonged to Gutenberg.

Dritzehen and one Andrew Heilmann hearing of the venture applied to be permitted to join in it. This was agreed to, and a new partnership was formed, in which Dritzehen and Heilmann had one share between them, Hans Riffe another, and Gutenberg retained an interest amounting to one half of the whole. Dritzehen and Heilmann were at once to pay 160 florins in gold for instruction in the art, and each of them was to pay another 80 florins at a fixed time afterwards. For some reason or other, the fair at Aix-la-Chapelle did not take place in the year when this enterprise was undertaken, and a new contract was made between the parties for a partnership to endure for five years. Our information regarding Gutenberg's connection with the art of printing is almost entirely derived from the records of the Strasburgh Law Courts before which the rights of the various parties to this last contract were determined.

By this contract Gutenberg agreed to communicate to Riffe, Dritzehen, and Heilmann, "all his wonderful and rare inventions," on condition that each of them should pay him the further sum of one hundred and twenty-five florins, fifty of which were to be paid in cash and the remainder by instalments at fixed dates. It

was provided that in the event of the death of any member of the partnership before the expiry of the five years, his representatives should receive one hundred florins for his interest in the concern. Andrew Dritzehen died at the end of two years and his brothers Georges and Claus demanded that they should either be admitted to the partnership as his heirs, or that the money placed in the concern by him should be paid over to them.

Gutenberg declined to do either of these things, and the two Dritzehens took legal measures to vindicate their supposed rights. They were unsuccessful. Gutenberg defended himself by producing the contract of partnership under which Andrew Dritzehen had undertaken to pay in cash 50 florins and a further sum of 75 florins by instalments. He proved that only 40 of these 50 florins had been paid; and that thus Dritzehen was indebted to him in 10 florins in addition to the 75 florins the payment of which was to be deferred.

The court gave effect to this defence by a judgment dated December 12 (*Vigil. Lucie et Otilie*) 1439, ordering that Gutenberg should pay to Georges and Claus Dritzehen the sum of 15 florins, being the difference between 100 florins agreed to be paid to the representatives of a deceasing partner and 85 florins, the amount of Andrew Dritzehen's debt to Gutenberg.

The evidence led in the law-suit is recorded at length, and it establishes beyond the possibility of doubt the fact that one of the "wonderful and rare inventions," imparted by Gutenberg to his associates was the art of printing with movable types. Apparently some of the experiments in typography had been carried on in Dritzehen's house, for immediately after the news of Dritzehen's death reached Gutenberg, he sent a messenger to take precautions against the discovery of the secret.

This messenger was Laurent Beildeck who, when examined at the trial, deponed that after Andrew Dritzehen's death was known, he was sent by Gutenberg to Claus Dritzehen to tell him that he must show no one the press (*presse*) which he had under his charge. Beildeck did so: and he adds in his evidence that Gutenberg farther told him to get Claus Dritzehen to go at once and open the press by means of the two screws so that the pieces (*stucke*) should fall asunder, and then lay them in the press, or on the top of it, in such a way that no person might be able to see or understand. This done, Claus was to go at once to Gutenberg, who wished to see him.

Ennel Schultheiss, the wife of Hans Schultheiss, a wood merchant, gave evidence that she heard Beildeck deliver this message to Claus Dritzehen, and tell him that his brother had four "pieces" in the press which

Gutenberg wished him to separate so that no man could discover what they were.

Andrew Heilmann, Gutenberg's partner, took similar precautions as soon as he heard of Dritzehen's death, and sent Conrad Saspach, the carpenter who had made the press, to get the " pieces " disjoined; and Anthony Heilmann, his brother, bears witness that Gutenberg gave similar instructions regarding the forms (*formen*) in the hands of Andrew Heilmann.

The only other witness whose statements need be refered to, is Hans Dünne, a goldsmith, who proved that he had received from Gutenberg within a space of three years as much as 100 florins in payment for articles connected with printing (*zu dem trucken*). It will be noticed that the German words used by the witnesses are still technical terms in printing : indeed the words "*forme*" and "*presse*" have their exact English equivalents in our words " form " and " press ".

Those who are without practical knowledge of the difficulties which attended the introduction into printing of movable types are apt to slight the great discovery which Gutenberg made. A little consideration will show that this is a mistake. It was comparatively an easy matter to produce impressions from one homogeneous block, which only required to have a level surface in order to insure accurate reproduction. But

separate types could not be so readily used. The art of setting them had to be discovered, and this art involved many considerations. The first requisite was that the types should be of perfectly uniform size, otherwise the pressure would have affected them unequally, and possibly enough some of the letters might not have come into contact with the paper at all. For elegant printing it was necessary to take great care on this point, for a single letter, taller than its neighbours, would have been sufficient to deteriorate, or even to destroy, a whole page. Then again it was no easy matter to bind the single types firmly together. The first contrivance tried for this purpose was a cord, knotted at one end, and passed through a hole bored in the wood from which the types were made. It is needless to say that this method of printing was attended with many drawbacks. It is scarcely possible to cut by the hand wooden types so uniformly regular as to produce a good impression. Even the little hole pierced through the body of each letter to receive the thread on which the type was at first strung was a source of inexactitude; and Gutenberg soon found it necessary to use wooden frames and screws to effect his purpose.

Heinecken's opinion is that he invented and produced a great quantity of letters carved singly in wood. "I am convinced," he says, "that Gutenberg

produced a considerable quantity of letters struck in wood: of this fact we have abundance of evidence from witnesses who have seen them." But he adds, "I am also convinced that it is impossible to carve with the hand types of wood so evenly and accurately as to be able to print entire pages with them, much less large volumes, as some think was done."

The defects of wood as a material for types are too numerous to mention. Recourse was soon had to metal, and types formed of metallic substances very speedily superseded those made of wood.

That Gutenberg was the inventor of metallic types scarcely admits of a doubt. During his stay in Strasburgh he incurred large expenses in the purchase of lead. Those who oppose his claim to be the originator of metal type-founding, maintain that this lead was required not in his typographic experiments, but in the manufacture of looking-glasses, a branch of industry in which they say he was largely engaged. This statement was long a puzzle to typographical antiquarians, but the key to the puzzle is not difficult to find. The fact is that Gutenberg was manufacturing metal types and using lead in the process. He was carefully concealing this, but his operations could not be carried on without creating some public enquiry. His answer to all questioners was that he was manufacturing "Mirrors" — and no doubt he was — but

they were "Mirrors of Human Salvation" — "SPECULA HUMANÆ SALVATIONIS."

No books have been found bearing Gutenberg's name as the publisher. But it seems certain that some actually proceeded from his press, for in 1459, in a contract arranging some family affairs with which his sister, a nun in the convent of St-Claire was connected, there is a clause in which he agrees that the books he had already presented to the convent should belong to it in perpetuity, and he convenants to supply the convent with any books suitable for religious purposes which he should afterwards publish. The clause stands thus in the original:

"Und umb die bucher, die ich Henne obgen. gegeben han zu der Liberey des vorgen. Closters, die szollen beliben bystendig und ewiclichen by derselben liberey, und sal und will ich Henne obgen. deme selben Closter in ire liberey auch furters geben und reichen die bucher, die sie und ire Nachkommen gebruchent zu geistlichen frommen werken und zu irme Godesinst, es sy zum lesen zum singen, oder wie sie daz gebruchent nach den Regelen irs ordens DIE ICH HENNE VORGEN. HAN TUN TRUCKEN, NU, ODER FURTERS TRUCKEN MAG, als ferre sie der gebruchens, ane geverde." No better proof could be adduced to show that Gutenberg had succeeded in his typographical efforts.

The questions treated in this and the previous chapter may be solved, according to the prejudices of Dutchmen or of Germans, on the one side or on the other. One grand fact remains, and the ages beat their batteries against it in vain. Even M. Bernard, an able and prominent advocate of the Haarlem school, admits it when he says: "C'est à l'École de Mayence et non à celle d'Haarlem que l'humanité doit la révélation de l'art typographique." That fact is this: that the art of printing in the true sense of the term — the art as it is now generally practised — is the invention of John Gutenberg. He who reads these pages benefits by Gutenberg's invention. Millions upon millions in every quarter of the globe, daily and hourly in almost every act of their life, reap incalculable advantages from it. Coster's typography, if any he ever had, died with him or before him. Gutenberg's labours bear fruit to the present day. Let any one conceive for a moment what the world would be without the printing-press, and he will find abundant reason to thank God that Gutenberg lived before him, and left to all succeeding ages the great and glorious legacy on which his fame is secured while the world shall endure.

It is not always the case in our day, and it was a rare thing three centuries ago, that an inventor should himself reap the benefit of his inventions. Gutenberg was no exception to this too common rule of life. He

prosecuted his experiments for many years and under many sacrifices. His whole patrimony was unsparingly devoted to furthering his project; money advanced by his relatives was sunk to perfect the invention; and at last he contracted large debts for the same end. His perseverance, even amidst overwhelming difficulties, never flagged for a day. In 1442 he sold to the Collegiate Church of St. Thomas, in Strasburgh, a property in Mentz, to which he had succeeded on the death of his uncle, and applied the proceeds to his great work. Some years afterwards, he returned to his native city; and in 1449 we find him residing there, and connected in business with John Fust.

Fust, a goldsmith, and a man of considerable wealth, found the additional capital necessary to perfect Gutenberg's invention. According to Trithemius, the first volume printed by Gutenberg and Fust was a Vocabulary, called a "Catholicon," which in all probability was an edition of Donatus's Grammar. This was a block-book; but says Trithemius, "with these blocks they could print nothing else, because the characters could not be transposed on their tablets, but were engraved thereon, as we have said. To this invention succeeded a more subtle one, for they found out the means of cutting the forms of all the letters of the alphabet, which they called *matrices*, from which again they cast characters of copper or tin of sufficient

hardness to resist the necessary pressure, and which they had before engraved by hand."

Schoeffer, first Fust's servant, and afterwards his partner and son-in-law, is the authority on whom Trithemius founds this account of the early history of printing, and by him the invention of metal types, or at least the discovery of the art of founding them in an available form, is attributed to Fust. "Truly," says Trithemius, "as I learned thirty-one years ago from Peter Opilio (*i. e.* Schoeffer) de Gernsheim, citizen of Mentz, who was son-in-law of the first inventor of this art, great difficulties were experienced after the first invention of this art of printing, for in printing the Bible, when they had completed the third quaternion, four thousand florins were expended." Schoeffer, an ingenious and sagacious man, soon discovered a more easy method of casting the types, and thus the art of printing was brought to the complete state in which it exists.

Gutenberg's connection with Fust terminated in 1445. In that year Fust claimed repayment from him of 2,020 florins, being two separate advances of 800 florins each with interest and other charges. Gutenberg refused payment on the ground that the advances had not been made at the times stipulated. A lawsuit followed, and Gutenberg was ordered to repay all monies received by him from Fust except

such as had been expended on the printing material over which Fust held a security. Unable to find the amount required, he was forced to allow the whole business to fall into Fust's hands, but he remained in Mentz, and probably continued to print. In his old age, he found a patron in the Elector-Archbishop of Mentz, who attached him to his Court. He is said to have become blind before his death, which took place in 1467 or 1468. He was buried in the church of the Recollets; and in 1837 tardy honour was done to his memory by the erection in Mentz of the magnificent GUTENBERG Monument, designed by Thorwaldsen and subscribed for in all countries of Europe. It is a bronze statue, raised on a pedestal of marble in the principal square of the city, which has now been named Gutenberg Place. The front of the pedestal bears the inscription:

JOHANNEM GENSFLEISCH DE GUTENBERG,
PATRICIUM MOGUNTINUM,
ÆRE PER TOTAM EUROPAM COLLATO
POSUERUNT CIVES.
MDCCC.XXX.VII.

On the opposite side of the pedestal is written: —

Artem, quæ Græcos latuit, latuitque Latinos,
Germani solers extudit ingenium,
Nunc quidquid veteres sapiunt, sapiuntque recentes,
Non sibi, sed populis omnibus id sapiunt.

CHAPTER IV

PRINTING AT MENTZ — FUST AND SCHOEFFER

IT is at Mentz, and in the office of Fust and Schœffer that we first find printing practised on a large scale, and in circumstances capable of being authenticated historically. In the hands of these artists the typographic art reached amazing perfection almost at a single bound.

It had been Gutenberg's ambition to consecrate the first great effort of his press to the production of a complete edition of the Holy Scriptures, and there seems to be little doubt that before 1455, when his connection with Fust ceased, he had made great progress with this work. Whether it was completed before the rupture of the associates took place is not

known. One is more inclined to hope than to believe that poor Gutenberg had the gratification of himself taking part in the issue to the world of the splendid monument of his labours. But even if some early copies were brought to the market before 1455, no doubt exists that the bulk of the impression found its way unsold into the hands of Fust and Schœffer.

This, the first printed Bible, and the first important work printed at Mentz, is an edition of the Latin Vulgate executed in metallic type of large size. Mr. Bohn, a well-known connoisseur in such matters, thus describes it : " It is called the Mazarine Bible, because the first copy known to bibliographers was found in the library of Cardinal Mazarin. It consists of 641 leaves, forming two—sometimes four—large volumes in folio, some copies on paper of beautiful texture, some on vellum. It was without date or name of the printers, as it was evidently intended to present the appearance of a manuscript; but it is supposed on good evidence to have been printed between 1450 and 1455, and it is not improbable the volume was all that time, that is five years—some say more—at press; for we know by certain technicalities that every page was printed off singly. These precious volumes, as splendid as they are wonderful, have excited the admiration of all beholders. The sharpness and elegant uniformity of the type, the lustre of the ink, and the purity of the

paper, leave that first great monument of the typographic art unsurpassed by any subsequent effort, nor could it be exceeded with all the appliances of the present day."

About fifteen copies of this magnificent book are known to exist. The British Museum, which has a singularly excellent collection of early printed books, contains a copy, which belonged to the library of King George the Third.

Fust is said to have visited Paris for the purpose of disposing of a portion of the impression of the work, and to have obtained from the King of the French as much as 750 crowns for the first copy sold. Afterwards, when it came to be known that other copies were ready for sale in unlimited quantity, for sums varying from 300 crowns to 50, he was suspected of complicity with the Devil. The story is not very well authenticated, and it is somewhat difficult to believe that His Sable Majesty selected such a book as the Bible for his first speculation in typography. But it is well known that a good many copies of the Mazarine Bible were sold in Paris; and the difference in the price charged for them is intelligible enough when it is remembered that the first issue was partly printed on vellum and partly on paper, and that the initial letters and other decorations were done by hand at various rates of expense. No doubt the volumes were originally sold as manuscripts.

But the time soon passed during which printed books could be disposed of under pretence of being executed by hand; and the next venture of Fust and Schoeffer was issued expressly as a printed book. This was the famous Mentz Psalter of 1457, the first printed book which bears the name of the printer, and the place and date of issue. The colophon appended to it is interesting for the description it contains of the new art. It is in these terms :

" Presens Spalmorum Codex venustate capitolium decoratus, rubricationibusque sufficienter distinctus, ad-inventione artificiosa imprimendi ac caracterizandi absque calami ulla exaratione sic effigiatus, et ad eusebiam Dei industrie est consummatus per Johannem Fust, civem Moguntinum, et Petrum Schoeffer de Gernszheim, anno Domini Millesimo, cccc.lvii. in Vigilia Assumpcionis."

Above the colophon the arms of Fust and Schoeffer are engraved on two shields, a device which was for many generations that of the Mentz printing-office. Curiously enough the word *Psalmorum* is misprinted *Spalmorum*, an awkward error in such a prominent part of a sumptuous volume.

The type with which this Psalter is printed is exceedingly large and bold, and the whole edition, which was printed on vellum, was sold so rapidly

that a second was called for in 1459. The beautiful execution of the initial letters has been often commented on, and it will be seen from the colophon quoted above that Fust and Schoeffer had by this time succeeded in producing them in colours by means of type instead of by the hand of the illuminator.

A smaller and more convenient style of type was soon found to be required, and in the same year with the second edition of the Psalter, Fust and Schoeffer produced from a new fount Durand's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum,* a folio of 320 pages in double columns of 63 lines each. The book is an encyclopædia of information regarding the origin of ecclesiastical ceremonies. Dibdin describes Earl Spencer's vellum copy of it as "probably the most curious and extraordinary specimen extant of ancient printing — the first essay of the smallest type of Fust and Schoeffer." "When we behold," he adds, "160 vast folio leaves on vellum of double-columned pages with 63 lines in each page, we may express our admiration with Schwartz at the copiousness of materials with which the earliest established press was furnished."

In the *Constitutiones Clementis Papæ V,* — of which three editions came out between 1460 and 1471, a farther improvement was introduced, that of printing the marginal notes along with the text; and an edition

of Cicero's Offices issued in 1465 is the first book in which "*leading*" was employed—by which is meant the introduction between the lines of type of a thin slip of lead to keep the work more regular. Thus, in ten years from the date of their first book, Fust and Schoeffer practised the art of printing with nearly all the appliances requisite for its perfection.

The first Bible with a date, known as the Mentz Bible, was produced by them in 1462, and is also a rare and beautiful specimen of early typography. Chance has preserved a curious and authentic record of the price at which this volume was sold. In a copy once in the possession of Guillaume de Tourneville, Canon of Angers, Van Praet discovered a Latin memorandum, stating that the price for which it was bought on April 5, 1470, was forty crowns. It may be interesting to add that the La Vallière copy of the Mentz Bible fetched at the public sale of that collection no less a sum than 4,086 livres.

It was necessary to describe with some detail these early specimens of Fust and Schoeffer's printing-press, because they shed some light upon the steps by which improvements were introduced in the art of printing, and they are noble monuments of the enterprise and perseverance with which the prototypographers of Mentz carried on their business. It would serve no good purpose to continue the catalogue of their publi-

cations; but it may be added that the activity of their press continued for many years unabated, and that the volumes produced by them were chiefly on theological, ecclesiastical, and legal subjects, and impressions of the ancient classics. Fust closed his long and laborious career in Paris, whither he had gone in the course of business in 1466. During the later years of his life he filled several honourable offices in Mentz. His son Conrad continued in the business as Schoeffer's partner. The latter became a magistrate and judge in Mentz, in 1489, and appears to have lived till about 1503, though the end of his life was not so much devoted to business as his youth and manhood had been. He was succeeded in the firm of Fust and Schoeffer by his son, John Schoeffer.

Long before the period which our narrative has now reached, an event had taken place which was destined to change in a most beneficial way the whole current of the history of typography: this was the famous siege of Mentz which took place in 1462, when the city was captured by Adolphus, Count of Nassau. All business was at once brought to a standstill there; and Fust and Schoeffer had to break up their establishment for a time. The consequence was that the working printers of Mentz were at once scattered over the face of Europe in search of opportunities of prosecuting their peaceful calling, and the

art of printing found a home with amazing rapidity in almost every country.

The following is a list of the dates of the first works printed at some of the chief towns on the continent; but printing-presses may have been, and in some cases certainly were established in these towns a considerable time before the first dated volumes were issued: Bamberg, 1461; Subiaco, 1465; Rome, Cologne, 1467; Venice, Milan, 1469; Paris, Verona, 1470; Strasburgh, Naples, Florence, 1471; Utrecht, Turin, 1474; Lubeck, Barcelona, 1475; Bruges, Brussels, Lyons, 1476; Seville, 1477; Vienna, 1482; Stockholm, Ghent, Haarlem, 1483; Rouen, 1487; Copenhagen, 1493; Avignon, 1497; Cracovia, Munich, 1499.

It is not worth while to extend this list beyond the end of the fifteenth century. In many cases it is evident from the names of the early continental printers that they were of German descent. To take a single example, "Sweynheim and Pannartz," the printers established by Torquemada in the monastery of Subiaco, near Rome, were undoubtedly Germans.

Many very interesting details might be written about these pioneers of typography, but to do so is beyond the purpose of this narrative. What remains of it must be dedicated to an account of the introduction of printing into England, and of England's prototypographer WILLIAM CAXTON.

CHAPTER V

WILLIAM CAXTON — THE BURGUNDIAN COURT AT BRUGES — PRINTING AT COLOGNE AND AT BRUGES — THE CAXTON PRESS AT WESTMINSTER.

IN ancient times there extended across the Kingdom of Kent a great tract of forest-land known by the name of *The Weald*. This Weald, Wald, or Wood (for the words are synonymous) has varied greatly in dimensions at different periods of history; for an increasing population and an advancing agriculture have been regularly encroaching on it and circumscribing its bounds. In the year 1570, William Lambarde, a famous lawyer and antiquary, describes it as being after the common opinion of men of his time, "conteined within very streight and narrowe limits, notwithstanding that in times past it was reputed of such exceeding bignesse that it was thought to extend into

Sussex, Surrey, and Hamshire, and of such notable fame withall, that it left the name to that part of the Realme through which it passed." It is manifest, Lambarde goes on to say, "by the auncient Saxon Chronicles, by Asserus Meneuensis, Henrie of Huntingdon, and almost all others of latter time, that beginning at Winchelsey in Sussex, it reached in length a hundred and twenty miles toward the West, and stretched thirty miles in breadth toward the North: And it is (in mine opinion) very likely, that in respect of this wood, that large portion of our Islande (which in Cæsars time contented foure severall Kings) was called of the Bryttish word (Cainc), *Cancia* in Latin, and now comonly Kent."

William Caxton was born, he tells us, "in Kente in the Weeld," and the utmost efforts of antiquaries have not enabled them to add to this information any thing sufficient to determine more precisely the spot where he saw the light. Most of his biographers state that he was born about the year 1412, but Mr. Blades, one of the most recent and most reliable of them, has shown strong ground for believing that his birth did not take place till after 1421. The first mention of him that has yet been discovered, is an entry in the Records of the *Mercers' Company of London*, which states that John Large and William Caxton were apprenticed to Robert Large in 1438, and it

appears to be much more probable that this took place about Caxton's seventeenth year than in his twenty-sixth. In the former case his apprenticeship would terminate on his attaining his twenty-fourth year : in the latter, not before his thirty-third.

Of Caxton's parents nothing whatever is known, but there are many reasons for believing that they were of middle rank in life and of respectable character. In the first place there was then in force a law which prohibited any young man from being apprenticed to trade unless his parents were possessed of a certain rental in land or from other property[1]. In the next place Robert Large, to whom he was bound apprentice, had previously been one of the Sheriffs of London, and afterwards held the office of Lord Mayor, so that considerable family influence must have been used to obtain for young Caxton so

1. " Et come en le dit estatut fait à Cantebregg entre autres articules soit contenuz q celuy ou cele q use de laborer a la charue ou charette ou autre labour ou Svice de Husbandrie tanq il soit dage de xij ans q de cele temps enav^{nt} il demoerge a cele labour sanz estre mys a mestiere ou artifice et si aucune coven^{nt} ou liene soit fait deslors enav^{nt} a cont^{rie} soit tenuz p^{r} nue : Nient obstant quele article & les bons estatuz av^{nt} faitz p toutz les ptiez du roialme les enfants neez dedeinz les villes & S^{ries} de Upland, des queux lour piers & miers nont de tre ou de rent nautre viver si noun lour svice ou mestere, p lour ditz Piers et Miers & autre lour amys sont mys de svir & liez appntices as divses artifices dedeinz les citees & burghs du roialme, a la foitz a lage de xij ans & a la foitz dedeinz de dit age, & ce pur lorgoil de vesture & autres males cus-

favourable an introduction to business. Lastly, Caxton alludes with gratitude to the excellent education which he received from his parents, saying that he feels "bounden to praye for my fader and moders soules that in my youthe sette me to scole by whyche by the suffraunce of god I gete my lyuyng I hope truly. (*Prologue to* CHARLES THE GREAT, *1485*.)

Sir Robert Large's place of business was a large establishment situated at the north end of the Old Jewry, and he was extensively engaged in trading with the continent. It was during Caxton's apprenticeship that he was Lord Mayor of London. In 1441 he died, leaving among other bequests a legacy of twenty marks to Caxton, a sum equivalent to about £150 at the present day. He had seven apprentices besides Caxton.

At that time the city of Bruges was the great emporium of continental trade. It is still a large city, full of most interesting and beautiful architectural

tumes q svantz usent en ycell : pissint qil y ad si g^nt chierte de laborers & auts svans de husbandrie q les gentils & auts gents du roiaume sont g^ndement empovez p la cause suisdite : Nre s^r le Roy considerant le meschief suisdit, et vuillant sur ceo purvoir de remede de ladvis & assent des S^rs espuelx & temporelx & à la request des ditz Coes ad ordeignez & establiz, q nulle home ou femme de quele estate ou condicoin qil soit, mette son fitz ou file de quel age qil soit de servir come appndice a nult mestere nautre labore dedeinz citee ou burgh dedeinz le Roialme sinon qil eit titre ou rent a la value de XX s. p. an a meins." 7° Henry IV cap. 1. *Twenty shillings in the reign of Henry IV, is equivalent to nearly £ 12 of our money.*

and artistic monuments of its mediæval grandeur. In no continental town are there more exquisite remains of Gothic art; in none more palatial private mansions; for to the wealth of a commercial city it long added the advantage of being the seat of the Burgundian Court during the period of its greatest splendour. At present commerce has deserted it; its palaces and mansions are empty; and of its 45,000 inhabitants about one third are paupers.

There can be no doubt that an eminent mercer like Lord Mayor Large had a large mercantile connection in Bruges, and through it with the Low Countries and the southern continental ports, for it was the centre through which the wool and other produce of England were exchanged for the more delicate fabrics of the Italian cities, and the imports which these cities received from the Mediterranean and the East. His master having died before the expiry of his apprenticeship, Caxton appears to have proceeded at once to Bruges, in which there was then a large colony of English merchants, and to have completed the term of his indenture under one of these merchants. We know from the Prologue to his *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, written in 1471, that he had at that time been abroad for thirty years, which would make 1441 the date of his leaving England. And we know that during his residence abroad he became a freeman of the Mer-

cers' Company, for during his visit to London in 1453 he was admitted to the livery of that ancient society.

That Caxton soon attained a position of eminence among the merchants of Bruges and of high credit with the Mercers' Company of London is proved by a few scattered facts which are all that is known of his career as a merchant while resident abroad. It appears from some documents preserved in the Archives of Bruges that as early as 1450, only a few years after the expiry of his apprenticeship, his name was accepted in the course of certain legal proceedings as a sufficient surety for the comparatively large sum of £ 110, equivalent to more than £ 1000 in modern money. In 1465 he is described in the Mercers' Records as "Governor beyond ye See," and the Company determine to write to him regarding some complaints which had been made to them "as well for lak of mesure in all white clothe, and brown clothe, as in brede of the same, and in lykewise in lawne nyvell and purple, etc." The Bruges Records also speak of him in 1469 as "Master and Governor of the Merchants of the English Nation at Bruges."

This office was an important and highly honourable one, and Caxton filled it with much distinction. It conferred on him jurisdiction in all trade disputes among the English merchants at Bruges, and a general superintendence of their commercial interests, and it would

appear, of the business relations between this "ffellaship by yende ye see," and the mercantile community at home. Whether Caxton held the office previous to 1464 is not known, but it is not improbable that he did, for in that year we find that he and Sir Richard Whitehill were appointed by the English Government "ambassadors and special deputes to continue and confirm" the treaty of trade and commerce between England and Burgundy which was about to expire. From the large discretionary powers entrusted to the ambassadors it is evident that much confidence was reposed in them by Edward IV. The proposed treaty was not arranged till 1468 when a total change had taken place in the relations between Burgundy and England, but Caxton was again one of the representatives of England when it was successfully negotiated.

Such are the chief ascertained facts regarding William Caxton's life till he reached, according to Mr. Blades, close upon fifty years of age — according to other biographers nearly sixty. It is rather strange that not the slightest trace of any love of literature during this part of his history appears in any record. Hitherto we have seen Caxton only as an industrious, honest, and successful merchant and magistrate, respected and honoured by his fellows, and rewarded with the confidence of his king. His future life was to be that of an author and printer.

The occasion of this sudden change can only be conjectured; but there were in Bruges many inducements towards a literary life, and many very powerful inducements towards such a life especially affecting Caxton.

In the latter half of the fifteenth century no court in the world approached that of the Dukes of Burgundy in splendour. From the year 1384, when that dynasty succeeded the Counts of Flanders, Bruges had been the seat of the Court; and a succession of reigning princes had been patrons of art and letters not less than of fêtes and tournays.

The Dukes of Burgundy inherited from their French ancestors their taste for literature, and the Ducal Library at Bruges was probably the finest private collection of books in the world at the close of the reign of Philippe le Bon, in 1467. He is described by a contemporary writer as "le prince de la chrestiennité sans réservation aucune, qui est le mieux garni de autentique et riche librairie." A regular *Scriptorium* was maintained in the ducal palace, and hosts of learned men, artists, caligraphers, and illuminators flocked to Bruges to enjoy the patronage more profusely bestowed upon them there than any where else on the Continent.

Charles the Bold, the son and successor of Philippe, was perhaps at heart more of a soldier than a

scholar, but he inherited all the courtly and refined tastes of his predecessors, and literature received its due meed of honour and reward under his *régime*.

This taste for letters and art was not confined to the ducal family. It soon reached the courtiers. The name of Louis de Gruthuyse, better known, perhaps, as Louis de Bruges, is celebrated in so many ways, that the mere enumeration of his accomplishments would fill pages. He was the best tilter of his time, the leading courtier of Burgundy, her ambassador in peace, her champion in war. More than all this, he was a man of high learning, a lover of all that is best in art, and a lavish patron of both. His palatial mansion in Bruges was the most magnificent specimen of the architecture of the period, and his Château of Oostkamp scarcely yielded to it in richness and beauty of detail. He formed a library, almost wholly executed by authors, copyists, and illuminators of Bruges and Ghent kept in his constant employ. Second only to that of the Burgundian Dukes, which had been a century in formation, it was in some ways superior to even that. It contained 106 works, all equally remarkable either for the grandeur of the volumes, the beauty of the vellum, the magnificence of the caligraphy, or the richness and multiplicity of the miniatures and illuminations which adorned them. The collection ultimately came into the possession of

the kings of France and it is still to be seen in the *Bibliothèque du Roi* in Paris, though the gilt and often jewelled bindings have been much injured in the attempt to destroy the Gruthuyse arms with which they were blazoned.

During the fifteenth century the relations between England and Burgundy were constantly changing, for in the contests between England and France, Burgundy adopted now one alliance, now another. In the latter part of the reign of Philippe le Bon, the diplomatic relations of the two countries were more than usually strained. There was no very friendly feeling between Philippe and Edward IV. of England, as is indicated by the failure of the attempt of Caxton to negotiate a treaty of commerce between the two countries. Indeed, at this period English cloth was not allowed to enter the Low Countries, and Flemish goods were prohibited in England. Yet in 1466 Edward had formed a "personal treaty" of alliance and amity with Philippe's son, Charles, Count of Charolais, afterwards Charles the Bold, and the death of the old Duke at once brought the two countries into cordial alliance. This friendship was very soon strengthened by the marriage, on July, 8, 1467, of Charles Duke of Burgundy, with Margaret of York, sister of the English king, an event which was celebrated with such unheard-of magnifi-

cence as to leave the chroniclers and heralds of the period at a loss for words sufficient to describe the splendour of the fêtes.

Three years afterwards Edward, driven from his own kingdom by the Earl of Warwick, found in the Burgundian court a friendly retreat. While in the Low Countries he was the guest of Louis de Gruthuyse, from whom he received all the magnificent hospitality for which that nobleman was distinguished; and when he left Bruges to re-conquer his kingdom of England, he was accompanied to Damme (where he embarked in a fleet of eighteen ships, given him by Charles) by the whole population of Bruges, rending the air with their acclamations and shouts of encouragement and attachment. No sooner had he recovered his throne than he remembered the kindness and affection of the Brugeois. The Seigneur de Gruthuyse was created Earl of Winchester, and Edward wrote with his own hand a letter of thanks to the citizens of Bruges for the cordial and friendly sympathy shown to him by them in his misfortunes.

Such was the Court of Burgundy, and such were the relations between it and the English Court in the early years of Charles the Bold's reign. Caxton's official position had made him known at court many years before. Now he became a *habitué* of it, and was appointed to some office in the household of the

Duchess, the exact nature of which is not known. He tells us himself how he became a man of letters and a printer.

A French ecclesiastic, called Raoul le Fèvre, a man apparently of most romantic imagination, and of considerable learning for the time, was chaplain to the Duke of Burgundy in 1464. In that year he completed a book written in French, entitled *Le Recueil des Histoires de Troyes*. The romance became the favourite one of the period. It was by no means, as its name would indicate, a recapitulation of classical accounts of "the tale of Troy divine." "Homer," says Dibdin, "is the foundation head of it, but his pure stream has been so polluted by the absurdities of Dares and Dictys, and in the thirteenth century by the licentiousness of Guido de Colonna, that it has no pretensions whatever to be a faithful historical legend. We are not only presented in this piece with the habits of feudal life, and the practices of chivalry, but with a multitude of oriental fictions, and Arabian traditions [1]".

Caxton among others seems to have been captivated with the work, for in March, 1468, he began to translate it into English, for this very quaint reason, which he gives us himself in the Prologue to his printed

1. AMES's *Typographical Antiquities. Dibdin's Ed., vol. I, p. 9.*

translation of it. " Whan I remembre that euery man is bounden by the comandement and counceyll of the wyse man to eschewe slouthe and ydlenes whyche is moder and nourysshar of vyces and ought to put my self vnto vertuous ocupacion and besynesse. Than I hauyinge no grete charge of ocupacion, folowynge the sayd counceyll toke a frenche booke and redde therin many strange and meruayllous historyes where in I had grete pleasyr and delyte, as well for the nouelte of the same as for the fayr langage of frenshe. whyche was in prose so well and compendiously sette and wreton, whiche me thought I vnderstood the sentence and substance of euery mater And for so moche as this booke was newe and late maad and drawen in to frenshe, and neuer had seen hit in oure englissh tongue, I thought in my self hit shold be a good besynes to translate hyt in to oure englissh to thende that hyt myght be had as well in the royame of Englond as in other landes and also for to passe therwyth the tyme. and thus concluded in my self to begynne this said wrke And forthwith toke penne and ynke and began boldly to renne forth as blynde bayard in thys presente werke whyche is named the recuyell of the troian historyes And afterward, whan I remembryd my self of my symplenes and vnperfightnes that I had in bothe langages that is to wete in frenshe and in englissh for in france was I neuer, and

was born and lerned myn englissh in keente in the weeld where I doubte not is spoken as brode and rude englissh as is in ony place of englond and have contynued by the space of. xxx. yere for the most parte in the contres of Braband flandres holand and zeland and thus when alle thyse thynges cam to fore me aftyr that y had made and wretyn a fyve or six quayers· y fyll in dispayr of thys werke and purposid nomore to haue contynuyd therin and tho quayers leyd a part and in two yere aftyr laboured nomore in thys werke And was fully in wyll to haue lefte hyt. tyll on a tyme it fortuned that the ryght hyghe excellent and right vertuous prynces my redoughted lady mylady Margarete by the grace of god suster unto y^e^ kynge of englond and of france my souerayn lord, Duchesse of Burgoine [&c., &c.], sente for me to speke wyth her good grace of dyuerce maters, among y^e^ whyche y lete her hyenes haue knowleche of y^e^ foresayd begynnyng of thys werke whiche anone comanded me to shewe the sayd v. or vi. quayers to her sayd grace and whan she had seen hem. anone she fonde a defaute in myn englissh whiche sche comãded me to amende ãd more ouer comanded me straytli to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated. whos dredful comãdement y durst in no wyse disobey becase y am a servaũt vnto her sayde grace and resseiue of her yerly ffee and other many good and grete benefetes,

and also hope many moo to resseyue of her hyenes but forthwyth went and labouryde in the sayde translacion aftyr my symple and pour connyng, &c."

A few more details of the progress of the translation are given in an Epilogue to the Second Book. It was begun in Bruges, and the translation of the Second Book was completed at Cologne, "in the tyme," says Caxton, "of y^e^ troublous world and of the grete deuysions beyng and reygnyng as well in the royames of englond and fraunce as in all other places vnyuersally thurgh the world, that is to wete the yere of our lord a thousand four hondred LXXI."

The third and last Book of the *Recueil* treated of the destruction of Troy, and Caxton was aware that Lydgate had already reproduced this part of the story. He tells us that it is therefore perhaps unnecessary to translate it into English, that having been already done by "that worshifull and religyous man dan Iohn lidgate, monke of Burye... after whos werke I fere to take vpon me that am not worthy to bere his penner and ynke horne after hym to medle me in that werke;" yet he will undertake the task for the "contemplacion" of the Duchess of Burgundy as he has now good leisure in Cologne, and has none other thing to do.

The translation was completed on September 19, 1471, and the manuscript was handed to the Duchess;

but Caxton had promised copies of it to many of the English frequenters of the Burgundian Court, and he determined to print it. His reasons are stated in the Epilogue to Book Third.

" For as moche as in the wrytyng of the same my penne is worn, myn hande wery & not stedfast, myn eyen dimed with ouermoche lokyng on the whit paper and my corage not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hath ben, and that age crepeth on me dayly, and febleth all the bodye, and also because I haue promysid to dyuerce gentilmen and to my frendes to addresse to hem as hastely as I myght this sayd book Therefore I haue practysed & lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne this said book in prynte after the maner & forme as ye may here see and is not wreton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben to thende that euery man may haue them attones ffor all the bookes of this storye named the recule of the historyes of troyes thus enpryntid as ye here see were begonne in oon day and also fynyshid in oon day whiche book I haue presented to my sayd redoubtid lady as a fore is sayd. And she hath well acceptid hit and largely rewarded me wherfore I beseche almyghty god to rewarde her euerlasting blisse after this lyf. "

The *Recuyell* bears no name of printer and says nothing about either the date at which it was printed

or the place where it was produced. But it is undoubtedly the first printed book in the English language.

A keen controversy has arisen on the questions: When and by whom was William Caxton taught to print? and, Where and when was this, his first essay in the art executed? The translation of the *Recuyell* was finished on September 19, 1471, and there is every reason to believe that it was printed soon afterwards. The opinion till recently most generally entertained was that this took place at Cologne, and that Ulric Zell was Caxton's master in the printing art; and this is confirmed by the following uncouth lines in the Proheme to Wynken de Worde's edition of *Bartholomaeus de Proprietatibus Rerum*.

> " And also of your charyte call to remembrauce
> The soule of William Caxton first prȳter of this boke
> In laten tonge at Coleyn hȳself to auauce
> That euery well disposyd man may theron loke.

But Wynken de Worde is far from being an accurate writer, and Mr. Blades has been able to show that in all probability Caxton acquired his knowledge of typography in Bruges and from Colard Mansion. His account of this period of Caxton's life is admittedly to some extent founded on probability only, but it is the best outline attainable of what probably took place between 1471 and 1475. It is as foblows: —

"Caxton having finished and been rewarded for his trouble in translating *Le Recueil* for the Duchess of Burgundy found his book in great request. The English Lords at Bruges began to require copies of this, the most favourite romance of the age, and Caxton found himself unable to supply the demand with sufficient rapidity. We have now arrived at 1472-3. Colard Mansion, a skilful caligrapher, must have been known to Caxton, and may have been employed by him to execute commissions. Mansion, who had obtained some knowledge of the art of printing (certainly not from the Mentz School) had just begun his typographical labours at Bruges, and was ready to produce copies by means of the press, if supported by the necessary patronage and funds. Caxton found the money, and Mansion the requisite knowledge, and between them appeared the first book printed in the new type, which was at the same time the first book printed in the English language, *The Recuyell*. This probably was not accomplished till 1474, and was succeeded on Caxton's part in another year, by an issue of the *Chess Book*."

"*The Game and Playe of the Chesse*" opens with a Prologue dedicating it to the Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward IV. According to Caxton it is a translation of a little French book that had come into his hands, and it appears to be taken from the treatise of

Jacobus de Cessolis through the medium of the French versions of Jehan de Vignay and Jean Faron. Caxton describes the volume as a collection of the "auctorites. dictees. and stories of auncient Doctours philosophes poetes and of other wyse men whiche been recounted and applied unto the moralite of the publique wele as well of the nobles as of the comyn peple after the game and playe of the chesse." The pieces on the chess-board are made to represent the king, the various orders of nobles, and the common people of the realm, all of whom are taught by the rules of chess to "gouern them self as they ought to doo."

The first edition of this book "was anone depesshed and solde," and copies of it are now of extreme rarity. A second edition which bears no date is remarkable as being the first English book illustrated with woodcuts.

Some years before 1476 Caxton appears to have resolved to quit Flanders and to devote the remainder of his life to the practice of his art in his native land. Neither his "weary hand," nor his "dimmed eye," nor old age that was "creeping on him daily," deterred him from carrying with him to the land of his birth the art that he had "learned at great charge and dispense." At an age when most men retire from active life to enjoy

in leisure the fruits of their labours, he entered upon years of unremitting toil, and established in England on a basis of rock the blessed invention of John Gutenberg. For nearly twenty years he laboured incessantly; writing, translating, printing, correcting. His industry ended only with his life. "Thus endyth —" says the colophon to the *Vitas Patrum,* the last product of his pen — "Thus endyth the moost vertuouse hystorye of the deuoute and right renowned lyves of holy faders lyuynge in deserte, worthy of remembraunce to all wel dysposed persones, which hath bē translated out of Frenche into Englisshe by William Caxton of Westmynstre, late deed, and fynysshed at the laste day of his lyff."

He took up his abode at Westminster. Stowe says "Therin (in the Almonry at Wesminster) Islip, Abbot of Westminster, erected the first Presse of booke printing that ever was in England, about the year of Christ 1471. William Caxton, cittizen of London, mercer, brought it into England and was the first that practised it in the sayde Abbey." But there seems here to be a mistake both as to the date and the Abbot's name. Certainly Islip was not Abbot of Westminster in 1471, and Caxton was unquestionably in the Low Countries in that year.

Of the Almonry, Dean, Stanley, the best authority on all matters connected with his venerable Abbey,

recently said : " As far as we can make out, it was close to and on the south side of the Gate House, which stood at the entrance of what is now called Tothill-street, and which then was included within the precincts of the Abbey. It is further identified by us that this Almonry was over against St. Ann's Chapel, which is a place generally known from a comical story in the *Spectator* under one of Sir Roger de Coverley's letters, where he goes up and down the streets after the Restoration, asking first for St. Ann's Chapel, when he is rebuked by the Puritans, and then for Ann's Chapel, when he is rebuked by the Cavaliers, and eventually only undertaking to ask the way to 'The Chapel.' The mention of this chapel in connection with Caxton's history is so far important that I believe we may trace from it, and the connection of Caxton's printing press with the Abbey precincts, the most obvious explanation of the name which is still given to the meeting of printers, which is called 'a chapel.' It is supposed that they kept their types and did something in this chapel, which I presume to be St. Ann's Chapel, and hence the title or name has been continued for their meetings. However, there Caxton lived, at the house called the Red Pale. That contains the sum and substance of all we know about the locality." M^c^ Creery refers to the Chapel in the following beautiful lines :

" O Albion! still thy gratitude confess,
To CAXTON, founder of the BRITISH PRESS;
Since first thy mountains rose, or rivers flow'd,
Who on thine isles so rich a boon bestow'd?
Yet stands the Chapel in yon gothic shrine
Where wrought the father of our English line;
Our art was hail'd from Kingdoms far abroad,
And cherish'd in the hallowed house of GOD,
From which we learn the homage it received
And how our sires its heavenly birth believ'd;
Each Printer hence, howe'er unblest his walls,
E'en to this day his house a *Chapel* calls."

Gibbon has said of Caxton that " in the choice of his authors, that liberal and industrious author was reduced to comply with the vicious taste of his readers; to gratify the nobles with treatises on heraldry, hawking, and the game of chess, and to amuse the popular credulity with romances of fabulous knights, and legends of more fabulous saints. The father of printing expresses a laudable desire to elucidate the history of his country; but instead of publishing the Latin chronicle of Radulphus Higden, he could only venture on the English version by John de Trevisa." The criticism in so far as it is slighting to Caxton is most unjust. Naturally enough he selected for publication the books that were most in demand. He had to earn a livelihood as he more than once tells us; and sometimes he found it no easy matter to dispose of as many copies of a book as

made the publication of it remunerative. Thus in the Prologue to the *Golden Legend* he states that the work was " grete & ouerchargeable " for him to accomplish, and that he was in " maner halfe desperate to have accomplissd it, " and was " in purpose to haue lefte it, " until the Earl of Arundel desired him to proceed with the work and promised to take a reasonable quantity of copies, and to supply him during life with a " yearly fee " in the shape of a buck in summer and a doe in winter.

Any thing like a complete account of the various works published by Caxton would be beyond the limits of this short Essay. They are on every variety of subjects — history, romance, poetry, religion, morals. The first book printed by him at Westminster was the *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers,* a translation by Earl Rivers of a French Manuscript. It bears date 1477. It appears from the Epilogue that Caxton revised the translation, and that in doing so he discovered that Lord Rivers had " left out certayn and dyuerce conclusions towching women. " Caxton conjectures that " som fayr lady hath desired him [Lord Rivers] to leue it out of his booke Or ellys he was amerous on somme noble lady for whos love he wold not sette yt in hys boke. " In a few humourous sentences the old printer expresses his intention to restore the omitted passage, " humbly requiryng all them that

shal rede this lytyl rehersayll that yf they fynde ony faulte tarette it to Socrates," the original author of the ungallant remarks, and not to himself, the mere translator.

Earl Rivers continued to patronise Caxton, who printed for him in the following year the *Moral Proverbs of Christyne de Pise*, an English version of one of the most celebrated books of its time. Caxton added to this volume a few lines beginning

> Go, thou litil quayer, and recommaund me
> Unto the good grace of my special lorde
> Therle Rivers.

In 1479 a third volume by Earl Rivers appeared under the title of *Cordyale, or the Four Last Things.*

Caxton's own labours as a translator merit especial notice. In addition to the *Recuyell,* the *Game and Play of Chesse* and the *Golden Legend,* which have been already mentioned, he published no fewer than twenty-one separate translations. Altogether, according to Mr. Blades, these make more than 4500 printed pages; and Dr Dibdin estimates that they extend to "not fewer than 5000 closely printed folio pages."

Ten of the translations are Romances, a species of literature of which Caxton was excessively fond, for he was courtly and chivalric in spirit. He was a "very gentleman that understood gentleness and

science," and "delighted in books that were not for rude uplandish men to labour therein nor read, but only for clerks and noble gentlemen that feel and understand in feats of arms, in love, and in noble chivalry[1]." The Mercer's apprentice of 1438 had become a courtier long before he established himself at Westminster, and felt that the experience and culture which he had obtained during his stay at Bruges and by his connection with the courts of Burgundy and England had raised his habits of thought to a higher level than that of the vulgar.

One of the first Romances translated by Caxton after he reached England was *The Boke of the Hoole Lyf of Jason,* which he dedicated to the Prince of Wales, not presuming, he tells us, to present it to the King, because he did not doubt "his good grace hath it in frensh which he well understandeth". The original work was by Raoul le Fèvre, and no doubt was undertaken in memory of the foundation of the Burgundian order of the Golden Fleece by Philippe le Bon. After *Jason,* there were issued from the Westminster press *Godefroy of Boloyne, or the last Siege and Conquest of Jherusalem — the Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, or Knyghthode — The Lyf of Charles the Great — The Hystory of the Noble and Ryght Valyaunt*

1. Prologue to *The Eneydos.*

and Worthy Knyght Parys and of the Fayr Vyene — The Boke of the Fayt of Armes and of Chyvalrye — The Eneydos — The Historye of King Blanchardyne and Queen Eglantyne his Wyfe, and *The Four Sones of Aymon.* Caxton's other translations are on various subjects. One, *Reynart the Fox,* is from the Dutch, and more than one from the Latin.

Of the historical works printed by Caxton the most important are the *Cronycles of Englond,* the *Descripcion of Britayne,* and the *Polycronycon.* These volumes appeared between 1480 and 1482. The first is a repetition of the old *Cronicle of Brute* with additions; the second is a chapter from Higden's *Policronicon;* and the third is a complete edition of that *Policronicon,* based on a revision of John de Trevisa's translation, with a continuation from Caxton's own pen. This continuation, the *Liber Ultimus* of the *Polycronycon,* is Caxton's only original work of importance, and contains the history of the period extending from 1357 to 1461. The other historical works printed by Caxton are of little value.

To Caxton England is indebted for the first editions of many of the works of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate; and his criticism on Chaucer shows, that though he was himself no poet, he could fully appreciate the merits of "the morning-star of song." In alle hys werkys, says Caxton, "he excellyth in myn oppynyon

alle other wryters in oure Englyssh For he wrytteth no voyde wordes but alle his mater is ful of hye and quyck sentence to whom ought to be gyuen laude and preysyng for hys noble makyng and wrytyng."

Caxton published no edition of the Bible, but his books on moral and religious subjects were numerous. The *Golden Legend* has been already referred to. Other works of this class were the *Psalter*, *Horae*, *Speculum vitae Christi*, *Liber Festialis*, *The Royale Boke*, *The Doctrinal of Sapience*, *The Art and Craft to Die Well*, *The Knyghte of the Tour*, etc. He also issued editions of *Cicero on old Age*, *Friendship* etc. In fact, it is one of the best traits in Caxton's character that he adapted his press to all the wants of his time, and the mere catalogue of works printed by him is a mirror in which we can see reflected the English life of the close of the fifteenth century.

Mr. Blades has enumerated a long list of Caxton's patrons, including Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII, and many of the chief nobility and commoners of England. Altogether he printed from sixty to seventy volumes between 1474 and 1491.

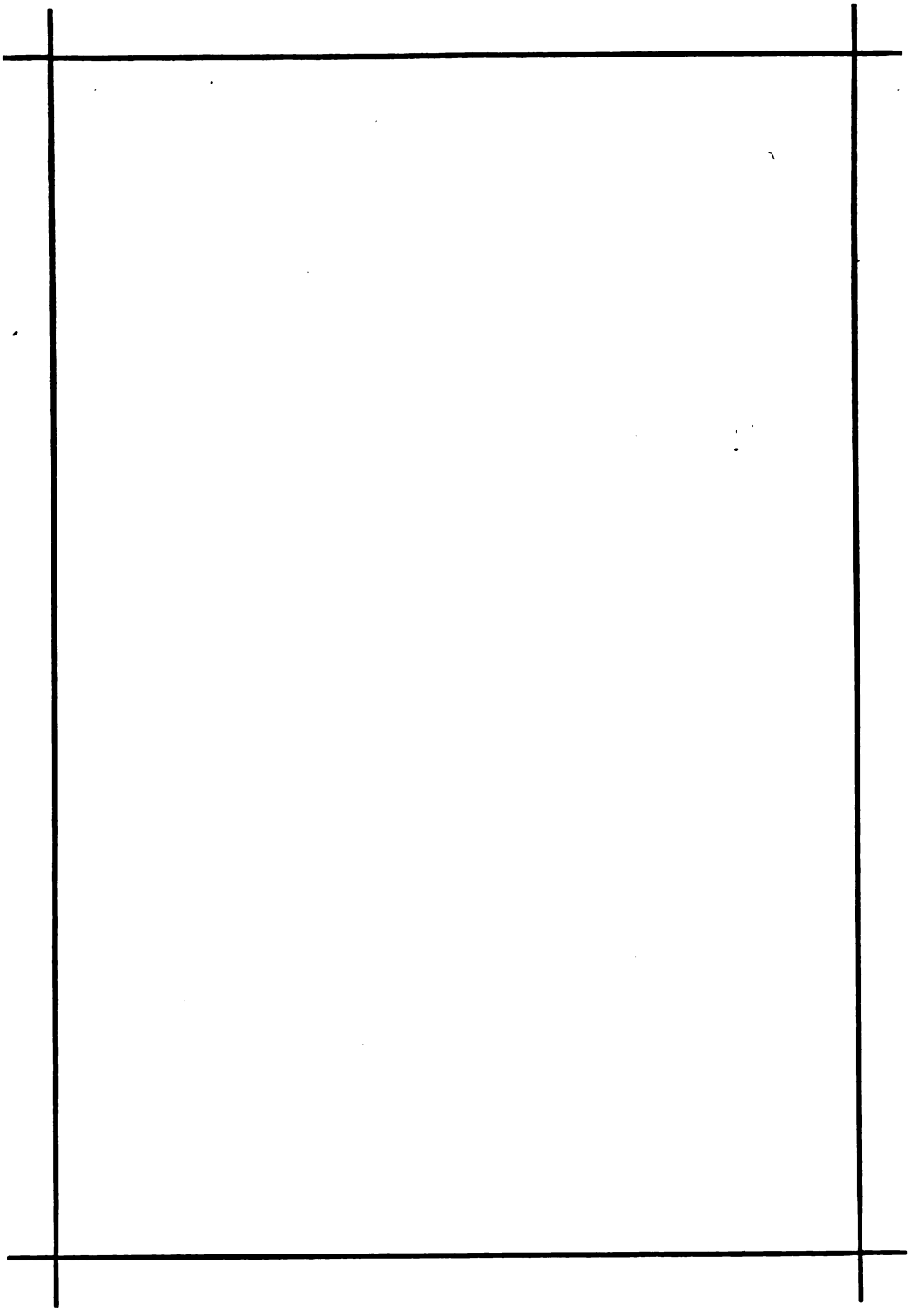
It would be an error to call him either an accomplished linguist or a great master of English style. He was a simple, honest, industrious man, earnestly devoted to his work, and perfectly aware of the imperfection of his education. More than once he deplores the

want of polish in his writings. In one of his late Prologues, for example, he asks pardon for "the rude and symple reducing" (translation) of the original author, and adds with characteristic candour "though so be there be no gay terms, nor subtle nor new eloquence, yet I hope that I shall be understood, and to that intent I have specially reduced the book." Yet he tells us in the Prologue to the *Eneydos* that some persons blamed him for using in his translations over curious terms which could not be understood by common people.

One great characteristic of his Prologues and Epilogues is the frank and simple way in which he tells his story, always attracting the sympathy and gaining the esteem of the reader by disclosing in the writer an earnestness of character and a singleness of spirit which are worthy of the warmest sympathy and esteem.

According to Mr. Blades, Caxton died in 1491. It appears that no authentic portrait of him has been preserved, though many of his biographers have adorned their works with imaginary likenesses.

THE END.



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